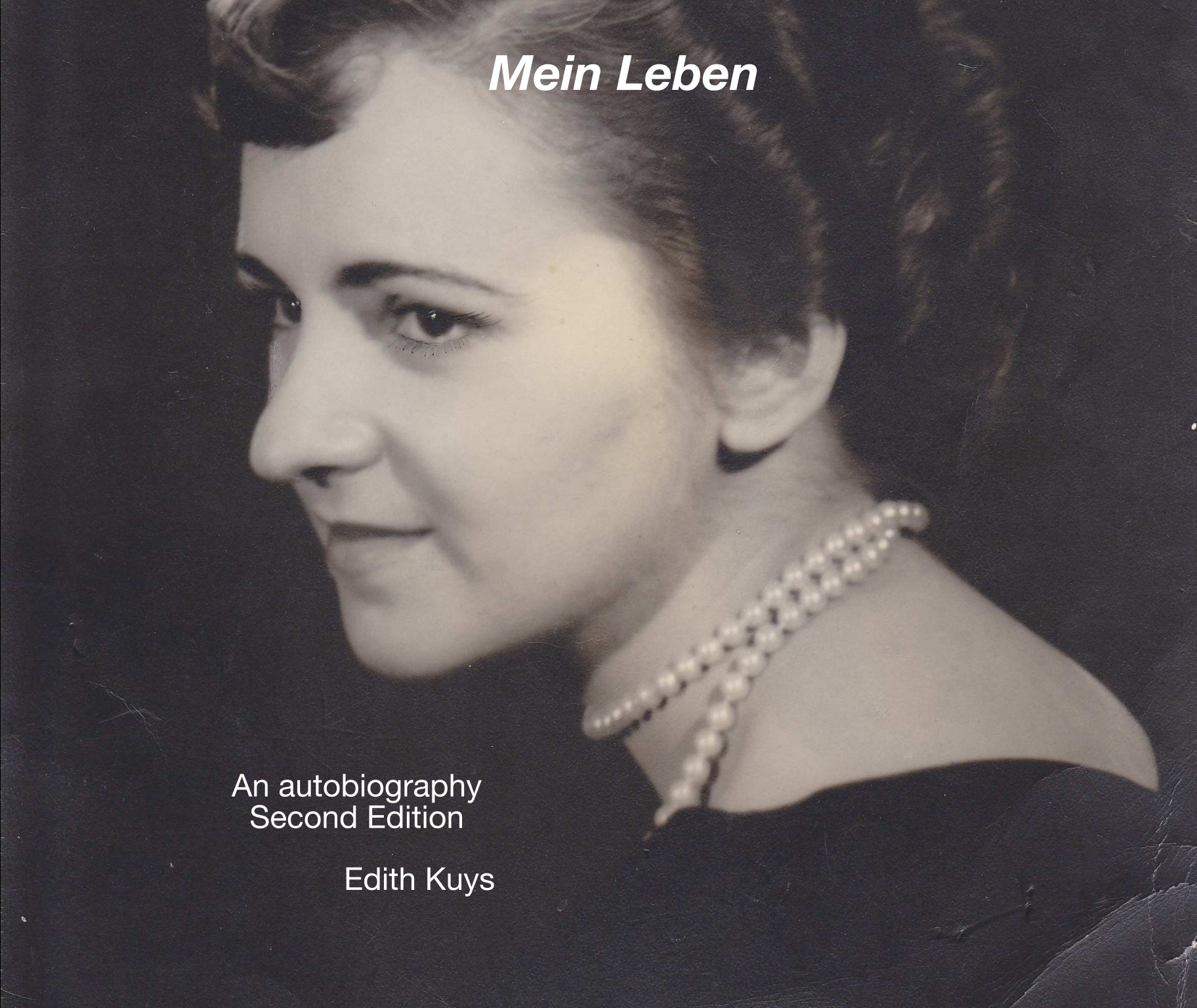


A black and white portrait of a woman, Edith Kuys, shown from the chest up. She is looking slightly to her left with a gentle smile. Her dark hair is styled in an updo. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, dress and a multi-strand pearl necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

Mein Leben

An autobiography
Second Edition

Edith Kuys



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Frederik and Edith Kuys 1974

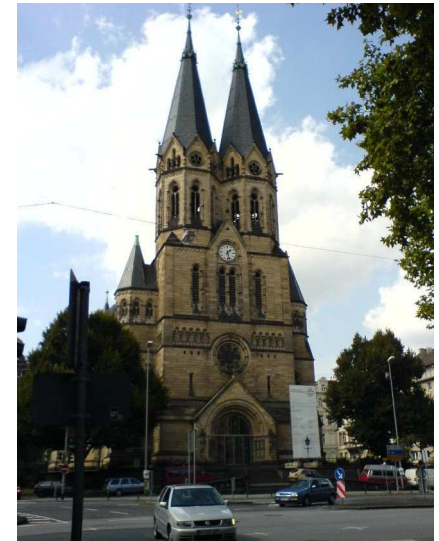


above: Otto Rückersberg pictured during his enlistment in the Kaiser's Army
below: Ring-Kirche (place where Edith's parents were wed)

The following pages are dedicated to my family. They contain memories of my childhood not freely shared till now. They are an account of experiences that probably influenced who I grew up to be. The words are also a loving tribute to those who suffered great indignities and lost their lives in the most horrible way. This is also a history of how a country can forget their values and divide over the promise of personal gain.

My parents Otto and Erna Rückersberg were married on June 5th in the "Ring-Kirche" (Church on the circle) in Wiesbaden, Germany. I was born on June 10th, 1928 in Limburg on the Lahn River and christened Edith on July 1st, 1928. I was still very young when my parents and I moved to Selters in the Westerwald region.

My father had received a promotion to be manager of his bank. We moved into a nice house with a lovely garden and I still have happy memories of this early part of my childhood. My grandparents, David and Bertha Rückersberg (Opa and Oma) had retired to Selters after my grandfather's many years of service in the Kaiser's (kings) army and following years in the German customs service. I remember their sunny house and neat and pretty garden and the goodies my dear grandmother prepared for me. Opa David and I laughed at the funny pictures he drew for me. He took me for walks in the pretty countryside and we stopped to talk to the farm animals on the way. In the winter he pulled me on a sled while Oma prepared hot cocoa and





above: Emma Kurnz

bellow: The birthday place of Edith's mother Erna Kurnz



cookies for our return. There were also frequent visits to my mother's stepmother, my Oma Emma Kunz. She lived in Wiesbaden, the capital of the state Hessen-Nassau and a lovely resort-town. She had moved there with her young stepchildren after the early death of her husband, my grandfather Karl Kunz. He was postmaster in the picturesque town of Assmanshausen on the romantic Rhein-River. The lovely house by the river, where my mother was born is now the "Hotel-post" Oma Kunz was a wonderful cook and baker and the flowers on her balcony were the pride of the neighborhood. Our visits made her happy and she loved when I accompanied her to church on Sunday morning. She came from a family of

protestant ministers and teachers and was an admirer of the German anti-Nazi protestant leader Martin Neimöller. My parents and I felt deep sorrow when she died from complications of pneumonia. It was a peaceful good-bye. She told us not to be sad because she was going to a better place. Her last prayers were for our safety.

When I was about 5 years old my father was promoted to become the director of the large branch of the bank in Frankfurt on the Main-River. We moved to a lovely apartment and I was enrolled in the "liebfrauen-school" an elementary school for girls. I made friends, did very well in school and still enjoyed visits to my grandparents in the black forest, I hoped to enter a university of my choice and be successful in my life.

above: Hitler salutes Nazi soldiers

below: Propaganda poster for Union of German Girls. Top Reads: Youth serving the leader.

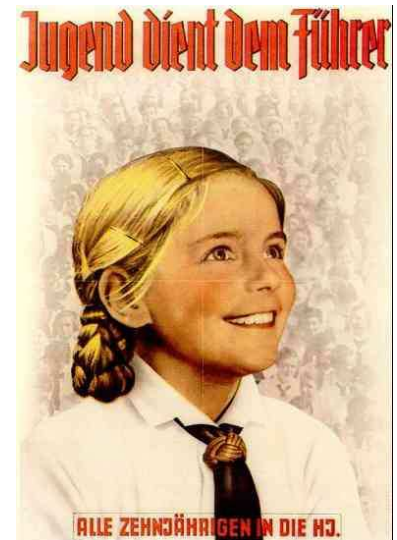
These plans came to a sudden end when one day I was called to the principal's office. He told me that he was very sorry but that he had an order to dismiss me due to my being half-Jewish.

My parents and I were heartbroken. While I was still attending classes all my classmates had to join one of Hitler's organizations called "BDM" (Union of German Girls) My ancestry prohibited me from belonging but my absence in the membership called attention to me. Many of my classmates did not seem to care a lot.

I am still corresponding with a former classmate and long time dear friend. She and I seem to be the only two left. The many years, the heavy bombing of Frankfurt and relocation have swallowed the rest of our group of classmates.

On the 25th of April 1935 my dear Oma Rückersberg notified us that my Opa David had suddenly died of a heart attack. It was a big loss to the family but I am now grateful that by dying a natural death he escaped the horrible fate that was to come to his dear wife, daughter, and other family members.

After I was dismissed from school and still very eager to learn, I applied to a highly rated private business school. On the 4th day of attending I was called to their office. There they expressed their sincere regrets but that due to my ancestry they could no longer allow me to take classes at their school. My next try was more successful.



above: Buchenwald concentration camp as US soldiers liberate its prisoners April 11th 1945
below: Otto Ruckersberg in his WWI military uniform.



My application to the Berlitz School of languages, and internationally owned institution, was accepted. I enjoyed improving my knowledge of the English language and a beginners course in Spanish.

The students were a very interesting group. Nobody discussed their circumstances. I suspect they very similar to mine.

All that came to an end when the area where the school was located was destroyed by one of the bombing attacks on the city.

In Wiesbaden, the head quarters of the bank my father worked for was forced to inform my father that they must terminate his position and freeze most his, and partially my mother's savings. His already meager food ration

tickets were revoked. We gladly shared the little food we received and I learned and still remember how bad hunger feels.

"Kristallnacht" (the night of broken glass) took place when Hitler's hoards burned many synagogues and smashed stores and homes owned by Jews. Early the next day, two Gestapo members came to our door and arrested my father. We found out that he was taken to "Buchenwald", a Nazi concentration/extermination camp near Weimar Germany. He survived his internment but I will never forget the horrendous condition my dear father was in when he returned to us. The next terrible blow was the arrest of my dad's twin-sister Emma. This sweet lady, my



above: The gate above the entrance to Aushwitz reads "work makes you free".

below: Left to Right: David, Otto, and Bertha Ruckersberg

favorite aunt, was sent to the notorious death-camp Auschwitz. After only a few weeks a box with what they claimed were her ashes was returned to her catholic husband and their young son Gerhard. In Selters my dear Oma Bertha had been robbed of her home and moved to Cologne (Köln) with her oldest daughter Johanna and Johanna's Lieselotte. My aunt Johanna was divorced from her Christian husband Karl. But having a Jewish mother the Nazis declared Lieselotte Jewish and she was sent to the concentration camp Teresienstadt Aunt Johanna died of natural causes.

In the summer of 1939 we went to visit Oma Bertha and Lieselotte. It was the last time we saw my dear Oma.

She was taken from her apartment in Köln, at the age of 76, to a death-camp where she became another victim of the holocaust. The thought of her suffering will always haunt me.

A Gestapo official took our apartment and we were moved to a ground floor apartment. We had to share it with another family. The Jewish husband was wheelchair-bound and his Christian wife took care of him and their two young children. There were two more families sharing an upstairs apartment. The entrance to the apartments was marked with a Jewish star. Shortly after our move, the Gestapo approached my mother and the other women in the house. They offered the women a better





above: a Jewish man is made to clean streets

below: political prisoners at Dachau made to do forced labor



situation if they divorced their Jewish husbands. Not one of the women accepted the offer. They knew it would have resulted in an instant trip to Auschwitz for their husbands. My father, who now had to wear a Jewish star on his coat, was put to work cleaning streets by the Gestapo. He was taken to Terezienstadt where he found his niece Lieselotte alive. My mother and I were put to work in factories. She worked for long hours in a chemical plant. I rode my bicycle daily to a suburb of Frankfurt where I had to work with others like me, some non-jewish Germans, and a group of political prisoners. It was a factory converted to manufacture parts of weapons for the army. Soldiers of the regular German army watched us.

One of them smuggled medicine to me to treat my badly frostbitten hands. We were instructed not to speak with the prisoners but rumor spread that they were members of the Belgian underground taken prisoner by the Germans. They arrived under guard by a prison-truck every morning. During the many daytime air attacks only the regular German workers were allowed to go to the air-raid shelter under the building. The rest of us had to continue our work scared, cold, and hungry.

While our personal losses ravaged our family and many friends, Hitler, who was referred to as "Der Führer" (The leader) had his troops bomb and invade European countries. He called his

above: the haunting image of downtown Frankfurt after the many air raids during 1943
below: the modern skyline of the reborn city of Frankfurt.

plundering “Blitzkrieg” (lightning-war). Italy was under the rule of his fascist friend; Benito Mussolini. He called himself “Il Duce” (The leader) he came to a bitter end by shooting and hanging in 1945. Wherever Hitler invaded, Jews and everybody who was suspected of not agreeing with him and his cohorts was herded into cattle-cars and taken to concentration camps continuing a practice that began in Germany. Hitler’s “Luftwaffe” (air-force) bombed London and Coventry and American and British aircraft power-bombed German cities and towns day and night. Frankfurt got more than her share. One night, the house we lived in was hit by a phosphorous bomb. We saved

the lower 3 floors from burning by our hard labor and very little water. Major water mains were destroyed by the bombings. During the attack we were all huddled in the cellar and saw the cellar-floor move from the bombing around us. After it got quiet outside we left the cellar and found most of the houses around us reduced to burning rubble and large craters where houses had once stood. A lot of residents lost their homes and also their lives. There was a stench of death all over the city. Frankfurt on the Main River suffered major attacks starting in June 1940. Attacks on October 4th 1943, March 18th, 22nd, and 24th followed leaving behind many victims and terrible destruction. A major attack in March 1945





above: Edith stands in front of a bombed out section of Frankfurt
below: A pre-war picture of Frankfurt with the main river running through.



left the city with 5,559 dead. A proud city with a long history was broken. The earliest historical document of Frankfurt reports events that took place in the year 794 ad. Frankfurt was a city of many churches, parks, a stock exchange, banks, theaters, opera houses, museums, statues, a fine zoo, a lovely botanical garden, a famous university, and the birthplace of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the famous son of Frankfurt (1749-1832) a poet and statesman. It was a city that with many other cities and towns, had fallen victim to the ideology of a maniac and his followers. Hitler was willing to sacrifice the last man, woman, child, as well as the last city and village. He drafted old men and young boys and made

them fight on his last fronts. By spring 1945 we could hear the fighting getting closer from the west and by late April all fronts collapsed.

It had been a hard winter with very little food and water. Food was rationed to crowds standing in line with a little pot or kettle. There was no heat or power. The windows were all shattered and the glass was replaced by whatever we could find till that was blown out by the next attack. Mother and I dug through the ruins around us for pieces of wood. Finding wood in the rubble was a risky job but it helped us survive.

It was a joyful day when the American army entered Frankfurt. There was no resistance. All we needed now was to hear that our loved ones were alive and returning

above: Otto and Erna Ruckersberg pictured after the end of the war.

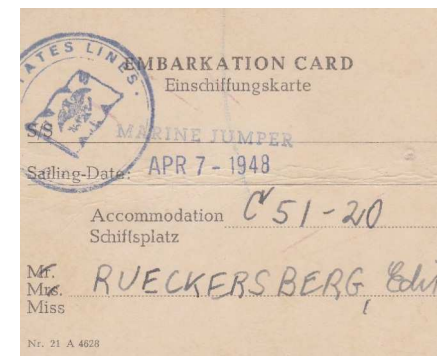
below: The embarkation card Edith was issued before she left for the United States

to us. The Russian army had liberated the camp and both my father and cousin were scheduled to get back to us as soon as transportation was available.

In a bunker in Berlin Hitler married his long-time mistress Eva Braun. The pair committed suicide by biting into a cyanide capsule to end their hate-filled lives. He also shot himself. My father was still on his long trip home when the director of the bank in Wiesbaden contacted my mother and asked for my father to return to his former position as soon as he returned home. The big bank building in the center of Frankfurt had been damaged beyond repair and plans for a new building were ready. Dad and my cousin finally returned. Lieselotte

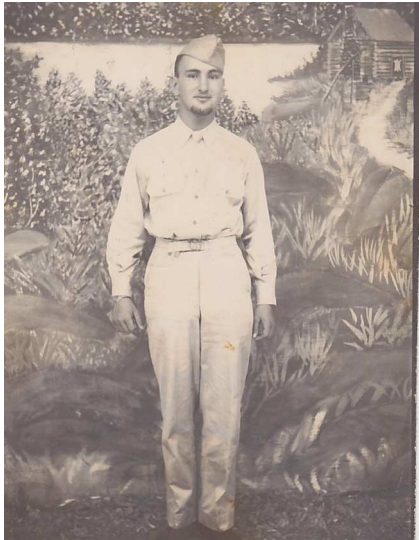
went to live with her father Karl and her stepmother but left for the United States within a short time. My father got deeply involved with the plans for the new bank. He said it gave him less time to remember the things that gave him nightmares. By 1947 a major rebuilding of Frankfurt and major cities started with a financial plan called the "Marshall Plan"; named after the American secretary of state Marshall. Our apartment was returned to us after the Gestapo official was arrested and the damage caused by the air-raids was repaired.

I got a job as an interpreter at the US army headquarters. I met an American soldier, Erwin Rogoff. I would eventually marry him in the United States.





above: Erwin and Edith posing in Frankfurt.
below: Erwin Rogoff Army Photo



With the help of my dad's cousin in Chicago and "Church World Services", I immigrated to the United States. It was difficult to leave my parents, family and close friends who never abandoned us during the terrible years under the Hitler-regime. But it was a problem for me to trust new Germans I met, wondering if they had been involved in Hitler's mischief. I used to wonder how my life would have been if I had not left Germany. I am sure I made the right decision. I married Erwin and we began to make a family and a life in the USA

In February 1957 my dear mother tried to call me with the heartbreaking news that my father had been critically injured by a hit and run driver. The call did not reach me and I got the terrible news by express mail, informing me that my beloved father had died on the third of February with my mother at his bedside.

He had booked passage on the US lines to visit us in just a few weeks. I was very excited making plans for his time with us. Excited to see him enjoying happy times with his grandchildren, my pretty little daughter Claudia and her sweet baby-brother Kim. The news of his passing left me inconsolable. By the time I learned that I had lost my father, his funeral was over. Mother came to visit us soon and told us of the huge outpouring of love, respect, and caring by family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and employees. The bank provided busses for employees who wanted to go to his funeral. The minister of our Lutheran church, who a few years before had confirmed me, delivered a beautiful eulogy. My friends Edith N., who was at the timesinging Wagnerian operas at the opera house, honored my father with her songs. He

above: The SS United States: the ship on which Omi made countless transatlantic trips to visit Edith
below: Edith and Erna

so loved operatic music. We used to meet with Edith and her mother and father until it became a big risk for us to meet. It was forbidden for my father to spend time in the presence of a German female. It was called "Rassen-Schande" (race-disgrace). The N. Family had all graduated from the conservatory of music and my father had loved to play his violin accompanied by them on the piano, wind instruments and my friend's trained voice.

Erwin and I divorced and I eventually re-married to a Dutch man, Frederik Kuys (Phil). He also suffered in the war and was a prisoner of the Hitler's Army. He helped me raise and provide for my children.

After my father's funeral, my mother (called Omi by family and friends) came to visit us every year. She took so many trips by boat that she got to sit at the captain's table. When it got easier to travel by

After my father's funeral, my mother (called Omi by family and friends) came to visit us every year. She took so many trips by boat that she got to sit at the captain's table. When it got easier to travel by plane she used Lufthansa for her annual trip. Each visit lasted 3-4 months and she made friends our neighbors and friends. She got to see her grandchildren grow up and get married. She loved to spend time with her granddaughter Claudia, then living in Maryland. She had good times with Claudia's children Erik and Deanna and enjoyed Claudia's garden and shared recipes. My daughter inherited her grandmother's domestic talents. She got to know and enjoy Michael, Kim's step-son. Omi arrived by plane just in time to visit her new great-grandchild Matthew (Son of my daughter-in-law, Susan and son Kim). Still in the hospital and only one day old.



above: Kim Rogoff and his family at his son's Michael's graduation from seton hall law school.
 below: Claudia's husband Jack and her children Deanna and Erik with there families.



She was still in the US to attend little baby Matthew's baptism. It seems so very long ago. Matthew's big brother Michael married to a fine young woman, Kristen, and graduated law-school. His young brother Matthew studies at the University of Vermont at the time I write this. Claudia has been living in Colorado for quite a few years. Erik, also in Colorado is married and he and his wife Kimberly have two fine young sons, Parker and Quintin, and a cute little daughter named Amaia. Deanna moved back to Maryland and is engaged to be married in February. I have shared good times with her, Claudia and her new husband Jack. Kim and Sue have a lovely house and property 30 minutes from my house.



Even though I accompanied my mom to the US and back to Germany for her last visit, her doctors, both

here and abroad advised strongly against any further travel for her. Her German doctor arranged for her to move to an assisted living home where I (known as the American lady) visited her every spring and fall. A couple of years before my grandson Erik married he backpacked in Europe and he and a few friends visited Omi for three days. The nurses at the home provided excellent room and board. Omi was proud of her visitors and loved every moment they spent together.

A few years later it became necessary for her to be moved to the nursing-home part of the facility. She had fallen and broken one hip and an arm in two places. She died during my autumn visit at the age of 98. I believe she would

have lived to her 100th birthday if she had not fallen. I often feel the presence of my brave mother around me. She survived two wars and the horrible years under Hitler. If there is a heaven she and all the loved ones who suffered and perished deserve a special place in it.

I have a pretty little book my father gave me for a birthday. On its pages loved ones, girl and boyfriends wrote messages to be remembered by. On my last visit to Köln to visit my dear Oma Bertha, she wrote the following words in my little book: (Interpreted from German)

“Do not distinguish people between those you like and those you don’t like, but search for the lovable in all of them.”

Signed: To my dear granddaughter

Your Oma
Köln, July 21st, 1939

Edith Ruckersberg Rogoff Kuys
Died February 8, 2018



Left: Erna and her brother Lothar Kunz
Right: Karl Kunz, Erna's Father



Johanna, David, Otto, Bertha, and Emma
Ruckersberg



Edith Age 6



Edith Kuys 2013

Publisher's Note:

Grandma, your story is an inspiration to me and my life. Your experience has provided you with such a humane wisdom that is often too lacking in this world. I have always had the pleasure of benefiting from this wisdom and I will continue benefitting for my entire life. I really hope that one day this world will learn from the struggles which people like yourself have gone through, that the evil forces of hate and ignorance will one day give way to the disciplines of understanding and reason. It has been a great pleasure making this book for you and I sincerely hope that it will be a lasting testament to you and your life.

With much love forever-

Matt Rogoff

Below: Top Left to Right: Kristen, Matthew, Kim
Bottom Susan holding Kellan, Declan, Michael



